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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6587
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 3 BOGOTA 4266

DEA FOR A AND ENA

E.O. 12065: N/A
TAGS: SNAR, CO
SUBJECT: THE NATIONAL POLICE MEAN BUSINESS

REF: BOGOTA 2950

1. SUMMARY. DURING THEIR FIRST FOUR MONTHS OF ACTIVITIES ON THE NORTH COAST, THE COLOMBIAN NATIONAL POLICE HAVE DEMONSTRATED WITH IMPRESSIVE SEIZURE STATISTICS THAT THEY MEAN BUSINESS IN THEIR FIGHT AGAINST NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING. IN CONVERSATIONS WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS, THE POLICE, FROM THE DIRECTOR GENERAL TO FIELD PERSONNEL, HAVE BEEN CANDID ABOUT THEIR ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND THE PROBLEMS THEY FACE WORKING IN THE GUAJIRA-THE TRAFFICKERS' BACKYARD AND COLOMBIA'S NUMBER-ONE CONTRABAND REGION. IN ADDITION TO NORTH COAST EFFORTS AGAINST MARIHUANA AND METHAQUALONE [redacted] TOLD EMBASSY OFFICERS ON APRIL 14 THAT, GIVEN PROPER EQUIPMENT, HIS MEN ARE PREPARED TO BEGIN AN ALL-OUT ERADICATION CAMPAIGN AGAINST COCA CULTIVATIONS IN THE LLANOS. END SUMMARY.

2. SINCE REPLACING THE ARMY AS COLOMBIA'S PRIME ANTI-NARCOTICS AGENCY ON THE NORTH COAST IN DECEMBER, 1980, THE NATIONAL POLICE SPECIAL ANTI-NARCOTICS UNITS HAVE SEIZED NEARLY 500 TONS OF MARIHUANA, 1,300 POUNDS OF BULK METHAQUALONE, AND TWO MILLION METHAQUALONE TABLETS. ON A RECENT TRIP TO THE POLICE HEADQUARTERS AT RIOHACHA, EMBASSY OFFICERS WITNESSED THE BURNING OF A TWO-STORY HIGH STACK (18 FT HIGH BY 20 FT WIDE BY 60 FT LONG) OF MARIHUANA BALES (SEPTEL) WHICH, ACCORDING TO [redacted] REPRESENTED EIGHT DAYS OF SEIZURES. OFFICERS ALSO NOTED 17 HYDRAULIC PRESSES, USED FOR PACKING MARIJUANA, HAVE RECENTLY BEEN CONFISCATED BY THE FOUR SPECIAL NARCOTICS UNITS: TEN PRESSES AT RIOACHA, THREE AT MAICAO AND TWO EACH AT VALLEDUPAR AND SANTA MARTA. SEIZURE OF THESE LARGE PRESSES (CAPABLE OF EXERTING UP TO 40 TONS OF PRESSURE) AND THE ACCOMPANYING STRAPPING MATERIALS DISRUPTS SIGNIFICANTLY PROCESSING OF MARIHUANA FOR EXPORT. [redacted] REPORTS SOME MARIHUANA READY FOR BALING IS LOSING QUALITY AS IT WAITS, UNPROTECTED FROM THE ELEMENTS, FOR EXPORT PACKING.

3. THE QUALITY OF GRASS SEIZED VARIES WITH LOCATION. IN MAICAO, THE MARIHUANA WAS IMMATURE AND POOR QUALITY, PACKED LOOSELY IN BURLAP SACKS. (COMMENT: IT MAY BE THAT CULTIVATORS, FEARING POSSIBLE NATIONAL POLICE ACTION AGAINST THEIR FIELDS, ELECTED TO HARVEST EARLY, EVEN AT A LESSER PROFIT, RATHER THAN RISK THE CHANCE OF LOSING THE WHOLE CROP. END COMMENT.) HOWEVER, IN RIOHACHA, THE MARIHUANA WAS TOP-QUALITY, PRESSED INTO ONE-POUND BRICKS AND VACUUM PACKED IN TEN-GALLON POLYURETHENE FOOD CONTAINERS.

4. IN BOTH MAICAO AND RIOHACHA THE POLICE EXPRESSED THEIR DESIRE TO BURN SEIZED MARIHUANA AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. HOWEVER, THE JUDGES WHO MUST ISSUE THE DESTRUCTION ORDERS ARE SOMETIMES SLOW TO DO SO, FOR VARIOUS REASONS--LACK OF FUEL TO BURN THE GRASS; OVER-WORK OF SUBORDINATES, ETC. GENERALLY, THE NATIONAL POLICE REPORT LITTLE SUPPORT FROM THE JUDICIARY, WHOM THEY TERM "NEGLIGENT", RATHER THAN INTIMIDATED, AND CITE LACK OF COOPERATION AS A SERIOUS PROBLEM. IN A APRIL 14 MEETING [redacted] ASKED IF THE EMBASSY COULD PERSUADE THE JUDGES TO MEET THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES, AND WAS REPRESENTATIVES OFFERED TO RAISE THE ISSUE IN GENERAL WITH THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE, WHICH IS BEGINNING THE FIRST INSPECTION OF JUDGES' CONDUCT EVER UNDERTAKEN IN COLOMBIA.

5. TRAINING OF BOTH FIELD PERSONNEL AND INTELLIGENCE UNITS CONTINUES AS SCHEDULED, WITH TWO ADDITIONAL COMPANIES, DESTINED FOR DEPLOYMENT IN THE LLANOS, GRADUATING APRIL 21. ATTEMPTING TO BALANCE A NEED FOR KNOWLEDGE OF THE TERRITORY WITH THE POSSIBILITY THAT FAMILIARITY MAY BREED CORRUPTION, SANCLEMENTE HAS DECIDED TO ROTATE THE MEN EVERY SIX MONTHS.

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6. THE SPECIAL ANTI-NARCOTICS UNITS CONDUCT THREE TYPES OF OPERATIONS: (A) MANNING ROADBLOCKS AT KEY CHOKE POINTS FROM PRODUCTION TO STAGING AREAS; (B) RAIDING KNOWN OR SUSPECTED STAGING AREAS: AND (C) CONDUCTING DAY AND NIGHT RECONNAISSANCE PATROLS. ALTHOUGH THE UNIT COMMANDERS HAVE DESIGNED PLANS FOR THE POLICE TO MOVE INTO THE SIERRA NEVADA GROWING REGIONS, WHERE THEY BELIEVE LARGE QUANTITIES OF MARIHUANA ARE STORED, THE UNIT CHIEFS NOTE THEIR MEN LIKELY WOULD MEET ARMED RESISTANCE FROM ANGRY CAMPESINOS, AND GENERAL SANCLEMENTE HAS RECOMMENDED THE POLICE CONCENTRATE, FOR NOW, ON TRAFFICKING ROUTES AND EXPORT STAGING AREAS. TO DATE, IN CONFRONTATIONS AT THESE POINTS, THE TRAFFICKERS HAVE PREFERRED TO FLEE UNDER COVER OF GUNFIRE, RATHER THAN STAY AND SHOOT IT OUT. HOWEVER, THE GENERAL WAS QUICK TO ADD THAT IF OR WHEN THE CURRENT STRATEGY SHOWED A DROP-OFF IN SEIZURES, THE POLICE WOULD GO INTO THE GROWING AREAS IN FORCE.

7. ALTHOUGH THE ARMED RESISTENCE EXPECTED BY THE POLICE HAS NOT YET SURFACED, THE HOSTICITY OF THE LOCAL POPULACE TOWARD THE SPECIAL ANTI-NARCOTICS UNITS IS GROWING. MERCHANTS REFUSE TO SELL TO THE POLICE, EVEN AT THE NORTH COAST'S INFLATED PRICES; THE CIVILIANS REFUSE TO ASSOCIATE WITH THE TROOPS; AND ON ONE OCCASION A TRUCK CARRYING POLICE SUPPLIES WAS HIJACKED AND THE DRIVER AND A COMPANION KIDNAPPED. ONE EMBASSY OFFICER WHO HAS VISITED THE POLICE INSTALLATIONS DESCRIBES THE PRIVATE CITIZENS' ATTITUDE AS "UNIFORMLY HATEFUL".

8. THE POLICE'S FUTURE COMMUNITY RELATIONS WILL DEPEND TO SOME DEGREE ON THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE COSTENOS BELIEVE ACTIVITIES OF THE ANTI-NARCOTICS UNITS WILL EFFECT GENERAL CONTRABAND OPERATIONS. THE NORTH COAST EXISTS FOR AND BECAUSE OF CONTRABAND. IN MAICAO THIRTY TO FORTY CITY BLOCKS ARE DEVOTED TO SALE OF CONTRABAND GOODS, AND TRUCKS AND PLANES FROM THE INTERIOR, INCLUDING PLANES BELONGING TO GOC AGENCIES AND LARGE PRIVATE FIRMS, LOAD-UP ON ILLICIT WEARING APPAREL, COSMETICS, FOODSTUFF, TOBACCOS, LIQUORS, APPLIANCES AND AUTOMOTIVE ACCESSORIES FOR DISTRIBUTION TO HIGH-RANKING EMPLOYEES. SEIZING CONTRABAND, WHICH PROVIDES A BOUNTY OF TEN PERCENT OF THE GOOD' VALUE, IS FINANCIALLY A MORE WORTHWILE OCCUPATION THAN CAPTURING DRUGS, AND THROUGH THEIR ROADBLOCKS THE ANTI-NARCOTICS UNITS HAVE HAD SEVERAL OPPORTUNITIES TO SEIZE GOODS AND COLLECT THE BOUNTY, WHICH COULD THEN BE USED TO FINANCE THEIR OPERATIONS. NEVERTHELESS, THE UNITS HAVE ADOPTED A "HANDS-OFF" POLICY TOWARDS GENERAL CONTRABAND, REASONING THAT THEIR MANDATE IS NARCOTICS AND THAT THEY SHOULD NOT ANTAGONIZE THE LOCAL POPULACE UNNECESSARILY BY DEALING IN SECONDARY GOODS.

9. THE SITUATION AT PORTETE BAY IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF HOW CONTRABAND ACTIVITIES MAY CONFLICT WITH-OR COMPLIMENT-POLICE OPERATIONS. PORTETE IS AN UNOFFICIAL PORT THROUGH WHICH MUCH OF THE CONTRABAND DESTINED FOR MAICAO ENTERS COLOMBIA, AND RECENTLY HAS BECOME AN IMPORT POINT FOR SHIPMENTS OF BULK MERCHANDISE, INCLUDING THE 1,300 POUNDS SEIZED BY THE NATIONAL POLICE. TRADITIONALLY, EXCEPT FOR SPORADIC VISITS BY A MOBILE CUSTOMS FORCE AND A MILITARY DETACHMENT LOOKING FOR CONTRABAND ARMS, PORTETE IS VIRTUALLY IGNORED BY THE LAW. HOWEVER, EVIDENCE OF NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING THROUGH THE AREA HAS THE CONTRABANDISTAS WORRIED THAT THEIR COZY OPERATIONS MAY BE ENDANGERED BY THE ANTI-NARCOTICS UNITS. ACCORDINGLY, THE SMUGGLERS HAVE PASSED THE WORD THAT THEY WILL TIP THE POLICE TO DRUG ACTIVITIES, SO LONG AS THE COPS LEAVE THE CONTRABAND OPERATIONS UNDISTURBED.

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10. ALREADY OPERATING IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT ON THE NORTH COAST, THE POLICE WOULD LIKE TO MOVE THE FOCUS OF COCA ERADICATION OPERATIONS FROM THE CAUCA, WHERE RESISTANCE HAS BEEN ENCOUNTERED, TO THE SPARSELY POPULATED LLANOS. WITH TWO COMPANIES READY TO MOVE INTO THE EASTERN PLAINS, [redacted] BELIEVES LOGISTICS ARE THE ONLY PROBLEM. "GIVE ME TRANSPORTATION, AND WE'LL GO IN", SAID THE COLONEL, ADDING, AS NAU OFFICERS HAVE OBSERVED, THAT LAND VEHICLES ARE USELESS IN THE ROADLESS LLANOS--HELICOPTERS OR STOL AIRCRAFT AND SMALL BOATS ARE NEEDED TO MOVE THE UNITS. ALTHOUGH [redacted] ACKNOWLEDGED THE "CUT AND SPRAY" OPERATIONS WERE BEST FOR FUTURE ERADICATION IN THE CAUCA, HE INSISTED AERIAL HERBICIDAL SPRAYING WAS THE BEST WAY TO ATTACK THE LLANOS COCA FIELDS. [redacted] ADDED THE POLICE HAD BY NO MEANS ABANDONED ERADICATION IN THE CAUCA; THEY WOULD RETURN IN FORCE; BUT BELIEVED THE POLITICALLY EASIER PROBLEM OF THE LLANOS CULTIVATIONS SHOULD BE ATTACKED FIRST.

11. IN DISCUSSIONS WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS, THE POLICE AT ALL LEVELS HAVE INDICATED A WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE AND BE CANDID ABOUT THEIR PROBLEMS. [redacted] HAS TOLD NAU REPRESENTATIVES HIS MEN WILL CARRY OUT THE ANTI-NARCOTICS CAMPAIGN " WITH OR WITHOUT USG ASSISTANCE". THOUGH HE ADDED THE JOB WOULD BE EASIER WITH US HELP, AND [redacted] CITING AREAS WHERE US FUNDS WERE MOST NEEDED, NOTED HIS COMMENTS WERE "SUGGESTIONS, NOT DEMANDS".

12. CLEARLY, THE NATIONAL POLICE BELIEVE THEIR OPERATIONS ARE SERIOUSLY DISRUPTING TRAFFICKING ON THE NORTH COAST. [redacted] NOTES THAT DURING THE LAST MONTH, THE PRICE OF FIELD LABOR FOR THE MARIHUANA CULTIVATIONS HAS BEEN RISING, INDICATING SOME CAMPESINOS ARE RETURNING TO LICIT FARM WORK, AND EMBASSY OFFICERS VISITING THE NORTH COAST HEAR MANY REPORTS OF LARGE CACHES OF MARIHUANA STASHED BECAUSE THE TRAFFICKING NETWORKS ARE, AT LEAST TEMPORARILY, INOPERATIVE. (NOTE: ARRESTS MADE IN OPERATION GROUPER HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO DISRUPTION OF THESE NETWORKS ON THE US SIDE.)

13. COMMENTING ON ANIF'S MARIHUANA LEGALIZATION CAMPAIGN, SAMCLEMENTE SAID LEGALIZATION HAD BEEN A MORE POPULAR THEME WHEN IT APPEARED THERE WAS NO WAY TO STOP NORTH COAST TRAFFICKING. ACCORDING TO THE GENERAL, NOW THAT THE NATIONAL POLICE SUCCESSES HAVE PROVEN INTERDICTION CAN WORK, THE LEGALIZATION CAMPAIGN IS LOSING STEAM.

14. COMMENT: WE ARE IMPRESSED BY THE SERIOUS COMMITMENT THE NATIONAL POLICE HAVE MADE TO THE CONTROL OF NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING. THE TROOPS ARE TRAINED AND FIELD DEPLOYED, WITH ARMS AND AS MUCH EQUIPMENT AS THE INSTITUTION CAN PROVIDE. IT IS NOT EASY DUTY. THE OPERATIONS ARE PERFORMED IN HARSH TERRAIN, IN ALL TYPES OF WEATHER, AND IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT, AND THE QUARTERS FOR HOUSING THE MEN BETWEEN PATROLS ARE CROWDED AND IN A POOR STATE OF REPAIR, WITH ONLY THE MOST RUDIMENTARY SANITATION FACILITIES. WHILE MORALE AMONG THE FIELD PERSONNEL HAS BEEN GOOD, CONTINUED DEFICIENCIES IN THEIR EQUIPMENT AND HOUSING SITUATION LIKELY WILL HAVE A LONG-TERM NEGATIVE IMPACT.

15. HEADQUARTERS SUPPORT IS PERHAPS THE MOST ENCOURAGING SIGN BEHIND THE NATIONAL POLICE COMMITMENT. REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE POLICE GENERAL STAFF MAKE FREQUENT TRIPS TO VISIT THE TROOPS, COMMEND THEM ON THE OPERATIONS AND HEAR THEIR PROBLEMS, AND DIRECTOR GENERAL MARANJO HIMSELF INTENDS TO INSPECT THE ANTI-NARCOTICS UNITS AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH. (NOTE: IN HIS FIRST THREE WEEKS IN OFFICE, MARANJO HAS GONE TO THE COAST AT LEAST TWICE.) IN DISCUSSIONS WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS, NATIONAL POLICE IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE COUNTRY HAVE INSISTED THEY CAN UNDERTAKE POLITICALLY DIFFICULT ANTI-NARCOTICS ACTIVITIES AS LONG AS THEY HAVE SUPPORT FROM THE TOP. EARLY INDICATIONS ARE THAT UNDER MARANJO'S DIRECTION, THE NATIONAL POLICE HIERARCHY WILL STAND BEHIND ITS MEN.
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